

NRCS Alabama

Current Developments



April 16, 2003

From The State Conservationist - *Robert N. Jones*

A few weeks ago, the Alabama conservation partners went to Washington for the annual National Association of Conservation Districts Spring Legislative Conference. This meeting provides an opportunity for our partners to meet with members of Congress and Congressional staffs to talk about conservation needs in Alabama. During the course of those few days, we heard several presentations by various leaders. I want to share with you comments that Chief Knight presented.

Chief Knight indicated that in the past, NRCS has been a service provider. Farmers and landowners came to us when they wanted information, advice, and even financial assistance. We still provide those kinds of services, but more and more the nature of our work is that of a merchant. Our job today is to sell conservation to producers and to buy environmental benefits for

the public. Congress provides funds through cost-share programs and technical assistance to help with the implementation of conservation practices on private lands. Farmers must still invest their funds and their efforts to produce conservation. Our job is to convince farmers that this is a worthwhile effort.

We know that conservation is a worthwhile endeavor. We have been about this business for about 80 years, and we know that it pays off. The results of good conservation are visible in that erodible soils are protected, water quality is improved, air quality is better, wildlife habitat is enhanced, and the beauty of the countryside is amazing. Spring is a great time to be reminded of the benefits of conservation.

Bob

Bear Creek Watershed on AL Public TV

by Sharon Andress, DC, Franklin County, AL

The Franklin County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) administers many programs that encourage proper land use and water quality enhancement and has a history of dedication to improving water quality and the environment. In 1985, the Bear Creek Floatway, a popular tourist attraction, was closed to the public due to fecal contamination from livestock. The Franklin County SWCD/NRCS formed a coalition with the neighboring SWCDs, Tennessee Valley Authority, Franklin County Cooperative Extension System, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, and local landowners to abate the pollution problems. The Floatway was reopened to the public in 1991.

A decade after that success, the Franklin County SWCD has a more active conservation program than ever. The result of our conservation endeavors is featured in a video that will be a part of the Discovering Alabama series. The natural beauty of the Bear Creek Watershed is the focus of the video. Over 120 people attended the premiere of the video March 27. "We're excited about the program and getting to show off the watershed," said Joel Pounders, Chair of the Franklin County SWCD. "It shows a lot of the different aspects of the watershed from the Bear Creek Floatway to the Bear Creek Lake. It's going to be a great way to educate people on the importance of the watershed."

The program will likely be shown for the first time on Alabama Public Television in the summer.

Legislative Breakfast

by Julie A. Best, PAS, Auburn, AL

Alabama's 67 conservation districts had the opportunity to meet with State senators and representatives March 5, 2003, for a Legislative Breakfast at the RSA Activity Center in Montgomery.

Terry Poague, president of the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts, Elmore County SWCD, emphasized that funding is critical for conservation districts. Landowners and legislators must work together. "In the life of Alabama conservation, legislators are the life's blood. We need your support," said Poague.

Representative Mike Hubbard spoke for Governor Bob Riley. Representative Hubbard emphasized that Governor Riley comes from an agricultural background; he understands the needs of those in agriculture and supports the conservation effort.

Representative Richard Lindsey was recognized as the House Member of the Year.

"Alabama conservation districts need to deliver a strong conservation message to the

Legislature. We made a good start with our Legislative Breakfast. Now supervisors must follow up with local senators and representatives to see that our message is heard," said Poague.



The Legislative Breakfast provided an opportunity for Terry Poague, president of the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts, to apprise legislators and conservation partners of conservation needs in Alabama.



L-R: Kirk and Howard Teichmiller have completed a dry-stack storage facility on their farm with assistance from the Upper Black Warrior River Basin 319 Project. Bob Keefe, River Basin Technician, provided technical assistance.

Upper Black Warrior River Basin 319 Project Completed

by Cherrie Haney, District Administrative Coordinator, Cullman County, AL

Seventeen conservation practices have been successfully installed in the Upper Black Warrior River Basin (UBWRB) Watershed. These practices were designed to reduce sediment and run-off into the Upper Black Warrior River Watershed in Cullman County and thereby improve water quality. All the cost-share practices funded by the UBWRB 319 grant have been completed and amount to \$111,785 cost-share dollars. The project was funded through the Environmental Protection Agency 319 grant and was administered by the Cullman County Soil and Water Conservation District; NRCS provided technical assistance.

Big Escambia Creek to be Cleared of Debris

by Charles Ramsey, Gulf Coast RC&D Coordinator, Bay Minette, AL

On February 27th, a Cooperative Project Agreement signing ceremony took place in Century, Florida, for the Big Escambia Creek Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration Project. Gulf Coast RC&D serves as a non-federal sponsor for the Alabama portion of the project and Three Rivers RC&D serves as a non-federal sponsor for the Florida portion. The entire project cost is estimated at \$6.3 million. The Army Corps of Engineers will provide 65 percent of the cost of project construction with non-federal sponsors funding the remaining 35 percent.

The problem on Big Escambia Creek began in the mid 70's when a large tree fell across the creek during a hurricane. The large tree blocked the channel and started a logjam that has resulted in the accumulation of debris. Studies indicate that debris is building on an average of 186 ft/yr.

The portion of Big Escambia Creek affected by the logjam is located near the City of Flomaton. The creek channel is completely filled with debris causing the normal creek flow to be diverted throughout the flood plain. The restricted flow also causes severe flooding in the City of Flomaton during periods of heavy rainfall.

The project is designed to reconstruct the channel allowing for normal creek flow that will

restore the aquatic ecosystem of Big Escambia Creek and help reduce the flooding problem in the City of Flomaton.

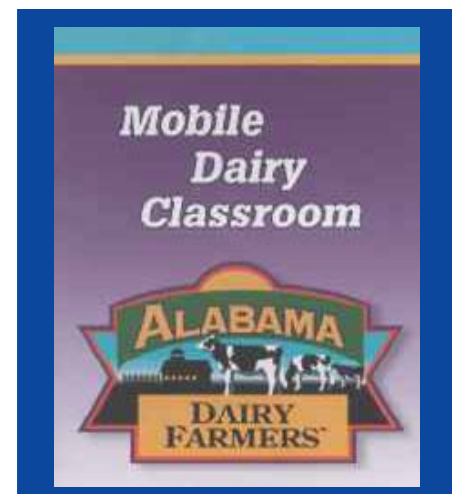
Construction is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2003.



L-R: Participating in the signing ceremony for the Cooperative Project Agreement for the Big Escambia Creek Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration project are Col. Robert Keyser, District Engineer with the Army Corps of Engineers; Dr. Brenda Litchfield, Chair, Gulf Coast RC&D Council; and Charles Owens, Project Manager, Army Corps of Engineers.

Milk—A part of everything that's good...

That's the slogan of the Mobile Dairy Classroom, which is part of a dynamic educational program sponsored by the Southwest Dairy Museum, Inc. The 32-foot classrooms feature a fully operational milking parlor. Each classroom carries a live cow. The Mobile Dairy Classrooms are available year round in the state of Alabama. Plan to schedule in advance due to the popularity of this free program. For more information, contact the Alabama representative, Matt Armbruster, PO Box 35, Alpine, Alabama 35014, phone (256) 223-1977, and e-mail: mattarmbruster@hotmail.com.



Alabama Hosts Soil Work Planning Conference

by Julie A. Best, PAS, Auburn, AL

Participants in the USDA Cooperative Soil Survey Program in Alabama gathered in Auburn, March 11-12, 2003, for a Work Planning Conference. Representatives from the three university segments (Auburn, Alabama A&M, and Tuskegee) participated along with other federal and state agencies and NRCS employees. State Conservationist Bob Jones welcomed the group to Alabama. He pledged his support of the soils program and indicated that his only regret is that there are not more soil scientists in the state. Soil data is the basis for much of the work of NRCS.

Charles Love, State Soil Scientist, gave an overview of the Alabama soils program and listed his goals for the coming years:

- ◆ establish four more MLRA offices by 2005
- ◆ update and maintain all soil survey NASIS data by 2007
- ◆ complete the once over by 2009
- ◆ recompile all old and modern soil survey publications by 2006
- ◆ create a digital soil survey for all publications by 2007
- ◆ continue to conduct special studies

Other presentations focused on research and new technologies that would enhance the work of the soil survey program.



Alabama soil scientists and staff gather to share ideas and plans for the future.

Alabama is one of the first states to appoint individuals to oversee quality assurance for contract soil work. Five employees have completed the training and were recognized: Rick Zellmer, George Martin, Bobby Fox, Ken Johnson, and Milton Tuck. Other awards were presented to Scott Anderson and Sarah Walker for formatting material for the e-FOTG, to George Martin for updating the NASIS data, and to Aaron Achen for work with historical replica and 508 compliance for the website.

Two common threads seemed to run through several presentations: The way that soil data is presented must change and the work of the soils program is never done. The need to gather and maintain data is ongoing.

The meeting combined a mix of the best: good food, good fun, and good fellowship while sharing ideas, needs, and concepts.



The Monroe County Forestry Committee (comprised of NRCS, FSA, RD, Alabama Forestry Commission personnel, and local landowners) held their Annual Seedling Sale on January 30, 2003. More than 1,400 tree seedlings were purchased by local residents. Proceeds from the sale are used to fund FAWN (Forestry Awareness Week Now) held for 6th grade students from each school in October.

DC Makes Conservation Planning First Priority

By Bill Hughes, Resource Conservationist, Auburn, AL

Steve Yelverton, DC Andalusia, believes that the conservation planning process is a critical FIRST step in helping landowners in his county. He feels that with limited help, he and his staff cannot afford to waste time following up on program applications that are either not eligible or are for the wrong practices.

"My goal is to have all conservation plans written prior to the first batching period. Because of nutrient management plans and other priorities, this may not be possible; I feel, however, that it will save us time during the ranking and contracting period, because we know that the requested practices are accurate and are a part of the overall farm plan."

Steve describes situations where the landowners, after going through the conservation planning process, had changed their minds and priorities. As a result, a new set of practices were identified. The conservation planning process allows the landowner to look at the entire farm and their problems then prioritize and schedule practices. During the planning process, Steve informs them of programs that are available to help them implement the scheduled practices.

"Leon Wages, Soil Conservation Technician, and I go to the field to review all program applicants

and to develop whole farm plans. If the land is rented, we try to contact the landowner to incorporate their decisions and put the plan in their name. This eliminates the need to transfer the plan to other producers every year."

Steve has joined the Cattlemen's Association in the county as a way to make new contacts. He has been on the program of the local meetings to discuss our agency's programs and services. As a result of

this outreach effort, many of the cattle producers in the county have applied for EQIP and other programs.

Steve said that in the last several months, he and Leon have had a significant workload of planning and application for landowners outside of cost-share programs. The whole farm planning process encouraged producers to apply practices

without waiting for cost-share funds.

Covington County has an extremely heavy workload, as do many counties in the state. Steve has found that advance conservation planning saves time and enables producers to select the practices that would help them meet their goals. When the time comes to apply for cost-share programs, they know which practices will be beneficial to them.



NRCS Employees Provide Training in State Envirothon

Alabama hosted the State Envirothon at the 4H Center in Shelby County April 10-12, 2003. There were 17 teams with about 85 students from across the state. Several NRCS staff presented training programs. Bill Hughes, Resource Conservationist from the state office, presented a program on the current issue—Farmland Protection and Conservation. Pam Mason, Elmore County DC, and Milton Tuck, Tallapoosa County Resource Soil Scientist, provided training in soils. Chandra

Berry, Shelby County DC, and Bob Keefe, Cullman County SCT, served as advisors and judges during the three-day competition. Sammy Harris, District Specialist, and Grover Reeves, District Supervisor, were also present from the Cullman County SWCD.

The Envirothon provides opportunities for training and competition to high school students in five areas of natural resources—soils, forestry, aquatics, wildlife, and farmland preservation and conservation (the current issue topic which changes annually). Winners from the state will compete nationally. There is also an international competition.

NRCS Contract Activities at Ft. Rucker

by Randy Martin, Resource Engineer, Ozark, AL



“Rotor wash,” a term used by aviators to refer to high velocity winds generated by the blades of an aircraft, is one of the problems that NRCS will treat along the runway at Hooper Stage Field at Ft. Rucker. NRCS will install conservation measures to repair and stabilize the area.

NRCS entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Army at Ft. Rucker to implement works of improvement on the base. The Army has identified nine sites for treatment. Others will be added as funds permit. Plans and specs for the first contract on Hooper Stage Field are complete. The contract will include measures to repair and stabilize erosion caused by “rotor wash,” a term used by aviators to refer to the high velocity winds generated by the blades of an aircraft, to reinforce a slope landing area, and to repair a riser for a drop inlet. NRCS will do all phases of the construction from surveys to final check-out. To date, the Army has allocated \$100,000 to this project; additional funds are expected.

AACD Auxiliary Encourages Participation

by Joan Love Smith, President, AACD Auxiliary, Auburn, AL

I appreciate the opportunity to be included as a “columnist” in the NRCS newsletter to write about the Alabama Association of Conservation Districts (AACD) Auxiliary. Members of the Auxiliary assist SWCD Supervisors and NRCS personnel with their conservation education projects and other activities. This year our goal is to increase auxiliary membership and to renew member interest in furthering conservation work in each county. We extend a very special invitation to NRCS spouses to join and participate in Auxiliary activities in your county, at the area summer meeting, and at the annual meeting in Orange Beach. This year at the annual meeting, November 16-18, 2003, we have planned an 8:30 brunch, a brief business meeting, and adjournment no later than 10:30 on Monday morning. Then we can all go shopping!!!

Please talk with your district conservationist and the Auxiliary members in your county to see how you can contribute. And don't forget, the work of Auxiliary members can count as Earth Team volunteer hours.



Very special thanks to Anne Miller, Lee County DAC, for creating Alabama's quilt square which will be part of a national quilt to be presented to the outgoing NACD President. We can always count on Anne.

Wiregrass Cotton Expo

by Julie Best, PAS, Auburn, AL

For south Alabama, the 2002 cotton-growing season was plagued with inclement weather. Despite the losses of last year, the cotton farmers attending the Wiregrass Cotton Expo 2003 in February in Dothan, were anticipating a better year ahead. The expo offered the cotton growers of south Alabama and Georgia a wealth of information through exhibits, ranging from federal agencies to seed and chemical companies. Representatives from the Alabama County Extension System and Auburn University presented statistical data relative to conservation tillage, weed control, etc. Seed companies promoted the newest products. Federal agencies provided program information.

The NRCS presence at the meeting included attendees, the Farm Bill exhibit along with handouts and a Farm Bill presentation. Approximately 250 individuals attended the meeting.



These cotton farmers from Barbour, Henry, and Houston Counties were among the 250 participants at the Wiregrass Cotton Expo 2003 held at the National Peanut Festival Fairgrounds in Dothan in February.

Black History Celebrated

by Fay Garner, Chair, Civil Rights Committee

The official theme for this year's Black History Month celebration was "The Souls of Black Folk: Centennial Reflection."

Johnny Trayvick, African American Special Emphasis Program Manager, initiated a "Black History Month Celebration" on February 13 in the State Office. Members of the National Organization of Professional Black NRCS Employees (NOPBNRCSE) and the State Office Hospitality Committee assisted. Highlights of the meeting

included Retired NRCSer Clifford Jones as the keynote speaker and a special presentation by the Alabama NOPBNRCSE Chapter of a plaque to Willie Tuck, the first African American to be employed by NRCS (formerly SCS). Willie's

brother, Milton Tuck, NRCS Resource Soil Scientist, Alexander City, gave a brief history of Willie's contribution to the conservation initiative of the Agency. After the program, state office staff and guests were treated to a delicious African American Cuisine feast.

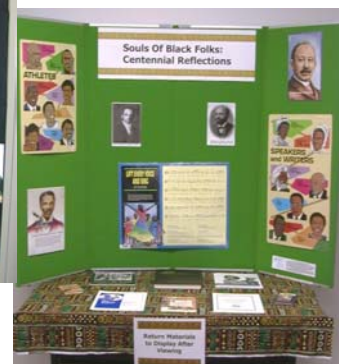
Black History Month was well represented in the State Office with two displays. One by Deloris Jones and one by Johnny Trayvick and Alice Love. Both displays honored the contributions of African Americans to our nation's history.



Willie Tuck (l) presented a plaque by his brother, Milton.



Deloris created the above display. Johnny and Alice created the one on the right.



From The Field

Chambers County Assists with Teacher In-Service Training

In January, the Chambers County SWCD/ NRCS helped the Chambers County Forestry Planning Committee to sponsor the annual Teachers In-Service Training for about 30 teachers from Chambers County and city schools. Other sponsors included local landowners, forestry consultants, Alabama Forestry Commission, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, and Farm Service Agency.

The workshop included a hands-on lesson and a timber cruising competition (picture) and tour of the East Alabama Lumber Company in Lafayette. The teachers learned the modern technology behind bringing a tree to finished lumber. They saw how



computers sized and determined the number of specific pieces of lumber from each log. Eddie Jolley, Lee County DC, assisted Milton Tuck, NRCS resource soil scientist, in a brief study of the formation of soils. The study concentrated on different soils that are typed, named, and essential for pine tree

growth and for all life on earth.

The forestry planning committee credits the teachers for the workshop's success. With their participation, the knowledge and importance of the forest industry and conservation of natural resources is carried to the community and to hundreds of young minds.

Conservation Tillage Meeting

The Andalusia Field Office recently hosted a conservation tillage meeting for about 80 people from surrounding counties sponsored by the Covington County SWCD and Monsanto. "Improving yields by improving soil quality" was the emphasis of the meeting. The use of conservation tillage in Alabama continues to increase. A FY2002 survey conducted by local conservation partners revealed that 40 percent (684,000 acres) of all crops grown in Alabama

used some form of conservation tillage system. As farmers apply this environmentally friendly farming method and share their success stories with others, the use of this conservation system will continue to increase.

Northwest Alabama RC&D Helps Feed the Hungry

The Northwest Alabama RC&D Council cooperated with the Hunters Helping the Hungry program by contributing funds to process more than two tons of venison to feed needy residents in the council area. Processors participating in the program are paid \$1 per pound to debone and grind the venison into deer burger.



Hunting is a popular recreation in Alabama. Many ethical hunters refuse to harvest more deer than they can eat. The Hunters Helping the Hungry program provides a win-win situation – the hunter can continue to hunt and the hungry are fed.

NRCS Helps Echota Cherokee Tribe with Interpretive Trails

The Echota Cherokee Tribe, with about 30,000 members across the state, is in the process of establishing a museum and cultural center, an outdoor education center, interpretive trails, an amphitheater, and a replica of a 17th century Cherokee village on 50 acres of land the Tribe owns on Lacon Mountain in Cullman County, AL. NRCS assisted the Tribe in mapping the layout for the interpretive trails. Native and herbal plants along the trail not only will illustrate Indian medicine lore but



also will teach students how to protect stream banks, reduce erosion, and provide wildlife habitat. The Tennessee Valley RC&D Council

submitted a funding proposal to help the Tribe create the interpretive trail system. The Echota Cherokee Tribe of Alabama has been named to the Honor Wall of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC. Scheduled to open in 2004, the museum will be the newest addition to the museums of the Smithsonian Institution. The Honor Wall includes the names of all the major tribes in the United States and all the Federal tribes in the state of Alabama.

Sumter County Hosts Interagency Meeting

The Sumter County SWCD hosted an interagency meeting at the University of West Alabama on February 13, 2003, for the Sumter County SWCD and employees, the Sumter and Greene County Committees, and the NRCS staff from both counties. The speaker for the meeting was Danny Crawford, State Director for the Farm Services Agency. Micky Smith, Chairman of the Sumter County SWCD, moderated the meeting. The Sumter County Farmers Federation provided a great meal.

Vestavia Hills Annual Urban Forestry and Conservation Fair

The Eleventh Annual Urban Forestry and Conservation Fair was held on February 18, 2003, at Birmingham's Boutwell Auditorium and Linn Park.

Five elementary schools (Brookville, South Hampton, Hemphill, Council, and Spaulding) and 400-4th and 5th grade students participated.

Hands-on activities included: The Benefits of Trees, Tree Cookies, Tree Rings, Water Jeopardy, Enviroscape, Recycle Toss, Alabama Animals, Quail Management, Backyard Conservation, Winter Botany, Life in a Fish Bowl, Casting Demonstration, Creek Critters, Tree Seedlings, Orienteering, Build a Tree, Portable Sawmill, and We Care About Forests. Twenty-four federal, state, non-profit, and educational groups participated to make this a successful event. There were 124 Earth Team volunteers who provided 744 hours of service. The in-kind service value was \$11,941. The total value of the project was \$17,341.

THE 2003 PROGRESSIVE FARMER IDEA

HOUSE in Blount County is now under construction! The pasture is cleared, the walls are up, and the interior framing is nearing completion. Murray Griffin, DC in Oneonta, has

been working with Dan Miller, editor with Progressive Farmer, as plans for the site are developed. Visit the Idea House website at www.progressivefarmer.com/house to view the progress.



Personnel

Accessions

Mark Rhodes, Soil Conservation Technician, Talladega, AL

Promotions

James Currington, District Conservationist, Phenix City, AL to District Conservationist, Geneva, AL
Jim Dunaway, Soil Conservation Technician, Tuscaloosa, AL
Joyce Nicholas, Soil Conservation Technician, Mobile, AL
Deryl Sharp, Soil Conservation Technician, Huntsville, AL
Jean Sparks, Administrative Coordinator, Auburn, AL

Transfer

Russell Morgan, Agriculture Engineer, Decatur, AL to Civil Engineer, NRCS, Lawrenceville, GA

Retirements

Beate Honey, Soil Conservation Technician, Rainsville, AL

Retiree News From Jesse Bush

The Spring 2003 retirees meeting will be in Tuscaloosa on April 24th and 25th. All activities will be in the vicinity of the intersection of US-82, US-11, and I-59/20 on the south edge of Tuscaloosa. Lodging is at Quality Inn just behind McDonalds, the evening meal is at Shoney's, and the business meeting on Friday is at O'Charlies Restaurant. All of these locations are on US-82. Retiree Don Presley has been very helpful in arranging places to meet, sleep, and eat.

On a note of sadness, recent deaths of retirees include Jimmy Holland (Geneva County), Morris Martin (Chambers County), Clifford Peacock (St. Clair County), E.H McBride (Mobile County) and Clara Smith (State Office). Please drop me a line (502 Overlook Drive, Opelika, AL 36801), call (334-749-0274), or e-mail me (cgbush@mindspring.com) when you know of a death within our SCS/NRCS family.

I would be pleased if retirees would send me their e-mail address. This would allow me to send you information in a timely manner regarding future meetings, deaths, and other notes of interest. Until next time.

Work Conference for Limited Resource Blackbelt Farmers

by Andrew Williams, Alabama Outreach Liaison, Auburn, AL

The Agricultural Partnership of Wilcox County sponsored another successful outreach work conference for limited resource farmers in Choctaw, Clarke, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Marengo, Monroe, Perry, Sumter, Wilcox and surrounding Blackbelt counties. Over 70 limited resource farmers and service providers attended the meeting on a partly cloudy, rainy Saturday morning in Wilcox County on February 22, 2003. The Agricultural Partnership consists of the Student Education Enhancement Program (SEEP), Wilcox County SWCD, NRCS, Farm Service Agency, Tuskegee University Extension Program, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Alabama Small Farm and Rural Economic Development Center, the Ala-Tom RC&D Council, and local limited resource farmers.

The conference was very well structured and facilitated by local limited resource farmers. The participants enjoyed a home-cooked meal prepared and coordinated by the local limited resource farmers. It was an informative outreach workshop.



Those attending the Small Blackbelt Farmer Conference heard presentations from federal agencies, university partners, and personal testimonies.



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